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The Church's Mission at Home and Abroad

ADDRESS
to the General Convention of 1913

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The Church's Mission at Home and Abroad: What Should be Done to Further It During the Next Three Years

IF I had powers of persuasion I would use my time to-day to convince you that the best and most profitable thing the Church could do during the next three years for its work of extension, whether at home or abroad, would be to take into careful consideration the whole plan of its organization for work; so that when the Convention meets again three years hence it may be in a position to adopt such a working plan as will show that the Church not only realizes that it has a great work to do, but proposes to do it. The duty it owes to the nation, as well as the Church's own best interests, demands this if for no other reason than that a right method is a controlling factor in any successful work. But there is another and more urgent reason for reorganization. There is no question that the Church is confronting tasks for which its present organization is inadequate. It cannot ignore any longer without discredit many things which will test its strength to the utmost.

The Immigrants

For example, hitherto we have taken no part in the work that must be done to help the new comers to our shores understand what true freedom depends on, except as individual dioceses have done what they could. The well-being of the State, as well as the Church's strength, demand that the matter be no longer delayed.

The Institutions of Higher Learning

To suggest other work waiting and which needs the Church's help in far more effective fashion than has been attempted heretofore: the institutions of learning in the country are the centres of public opinion, since in the long run college men and women are the determining force in social development. In these, especially in the Western states, it is by no means unusual to find young men and women who have never heard of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The Church ought not to allow this to continue on account of the loss it entails. If what somebody has said be true, that as long as we have the Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution, American institutions are safe, then weight is added to the obligation that rests upon you. But if it is to be done, it were futile to talk of the dioceses doing it unaided. As a matter of fact, in those states where such work is needed most the Church is not strong enough to do it as it should be done. The Church must not lose what is of essential value to its welfare, or fail in the duty it owes the State, because some diocese is unable to meet all the demands which the Church's best interests lay upon it.

The Rural Districts

Yet one more illustration of the larger things that challenge the Church's endeavor. In the rural districts throughout the country is found practically a pure American population; yet these are becoming rapidly unchurched, with all the attendant marks of deterioration. Here again the work to be done is generally within the limits of dioceses that are weak financially. They cannot meet the problem as it should be met. Yet from these same country districts constant recruits come to

our cities. It is largely for the Church to determine whether the new life drawn thither shall help or hinder a right civic development, to say nothing of its own safeguarding and enriching. I confess, there is no waste that seems to me so serious as this. There is no reason why the descendants of those who first settled this land should not add increasingly to its real power and wealth and righteousness. And they would, if they had a chance. Of this there is proof that cannot be gainsaid in the results of the work done by those bishops and priests who for the Church's honor have thrown themselves into the task. Where the means of development and the teaching on which character depends have been brought within the reach of these our fellow-citizens, the results have been astonishing, showing that here is a fertile land indeed, waiting to be tilled for the harvest. It is practically trifling with its own future well-being for the Church to leave it; as it is cruel to allow the dioceses to bear the burden alone.

The Need of Greater Efficiency

I need not enumerate other large opportunities inviting the Church to gird on its strength. This is enough to set one thinking. If we are to do any of these things we must develop greater efficiency. Certainly as things are, they cannot be done. Hence it is interesting to note what are the resources of the Church, that we may learn whether the Church is doing all it can. The Church furnishes a disproportionate share of the courage and brains that direct the great enterprises in our country. It provides a large part of the wealth with which these are prosecuted. It is conspicuous wherever culture and refinement and all that adds color to life are found. Its people are generous to respond to any appeal for relief

in distress as in all that lightens the burdens of the unfortunate. Where effort is made for the amelioration of conditions its people are strong helpers. Where work for God and righteousness is being done, its priests and lay workers are in the forefront. Its best asset is the character of its clergy. With simplicity and sanity it interprets for men the Revelation showed by the Incarnate One. With fidelity it clings to the Catholic tradition while it bears witness to human liberty. Surely the Church in America is not lacking in resources for the task to which its Master calls it

A National Church Requires National Organization

How effectively then does the Church apply this strength for its work of extension? It would not be fair to say that it makes no use of it at all, for that would do injustice to the splendid exhibit of individual endeavor and faithfulness. But we should have no right to complain if the casual observer charged the Church with showing no sense of responsibility for the right use of the amazing power with which the Lord has endowed it. So far as organization is concerned, the Church to-day, when it has become national, is practically the same as it was when our fathers were struggling to save it from perishing. There is no more unity of thought and action, so far as the work of extension is concerned, than in the day when Kemper was consecrated and sent to plant the Church in the country to the westward. In such a time as that, when every man had to be ready to defend his own home against sudden attack, there was something fine in the single messenger being sent after his brethren to minister to them and their children while the wilderness was being sub-

dued to provide homes for Americans. But times have changed. The settlements have grown together and have become the nation. Individualism has given place to the co-operation and well-ordered system that mark intelligent forethought and performance. In the Church alone must we look for a survival of the methods that the stress and poverty of the first days compelled. To this day, when changing conditions require that a missionary district be created, a bishop is consecrated and thrown on his own resources as if he were embarking on an enterprise in which he alone is concerned, and whose fate concerns none beside himself and those whom he has persuaded to cast in their lot with him. Surely there is room for improvement.

The Centre and the Outposts

In the old time communication between distant parts was difficult and of necessity men worked singly or in companies, dependent on their own resources, compelled to do the best they could without knowing what others were doing and without expecting help to come to them through the co-operation of friends. To-day men have changed all that, and, close contact between remotest sections being possible, they have been quick to avail themselves of the advantage, and the whole force of the organization concerned is ready to be applied for its least interest. I had the privilege of being shown the system of one of the great corporations, and I saw how its smallest agent in the farthest corner knew that he was taken account of by the mighty power that he represented, and at his appeal all its resources were at his service if needed for the best interests of the enterprise he was charged with. The Church has, I believe, the unique distinction, and this only within the States,

of sticking to the plan of requiring each of its men to work as if there were nothing on which he might depend except his own efforts, nor help except as he can find it. One who did not understand our mode of procedure could not be blamed if he concluded that there was no bond uniting our missionary bishops, or that these had nothing in common with the dioceses that have developed strength enough to take care of themselves. The Church is alone in thus seeming to cling to the theory that individualism is stronger than co-operation. I do not believe there is another organization in America which would expect its representative to depend on his own unaided ability to win friends for the work which he is doing for it. But the Church goes even further and almost displays genius in making it appear that the support its representative receives is personal favor showed the individual, and is to be credited to the generosity that finds pleasure in relieving distress.

Conservatism may be Overdone

Conservatism has its merits, and the Church has definite leanings to it. There is something in the very atmosphere of the Church that is conducive to it. We all become conservatives, even if we began as radicals. And for my own part I love it and have no hesitation in saying that I believe not the least factor in the blessing which the Church manifestly brings wherever it comes is in the conservatism that it begets and the reverence it induces for the principles and theories which have been the bulwarks of Christian civilization. But even the best and most admirable things may be overdone, and to conserve the methods of the past when the whole world has learned how ineffectual and wasteful they are, is not to the Church's credit. Worse, it has

worked definite mischief. In reality the Church is strong enough to do whatever its own mission and the best interests of the Nation demand. Practically it represents (outside the few strong dioceses) a large number of weak communities, each one helpless to cope with the obstacles confronting it. In reality, its wealth is sufficient to maintain any enterprise that is necessary for its own well-being or for the sake of the Nation it delights to serve. Practically it is poor and impotent in the face of work which for the sake of its own integrity must be done, simply because perhaps not more than one-third of its people realize that the Church's prosperity is a test of their fidelity as Christians.

Really Rich, Practically Poor

The point of view of the whole body is affected by its wrong conservatism and nothing could be more damaging. The diocese becomes certain that no obligation rests upon it till its last need is provided for. The parish is certain it owes nobody anything until it has done all it would like to do for itself. Naturally and logically the individual concludes that he owes nothing to either of them till he has provided himself with all he would like to have. But nobody can find fault with any of them, since the Church in General Convention assembled has, until it met in Cincinnati, consistently cast all its canons relating to its work of extension in such form as to make it easy for men to believe that this work of extension is something apart from the regular and normal work of the Church; to be undertaken if the pious are moved thereto, after they have provided for themselves. Only the other day was that canon stricken out which solemnly ordered that in every parish at least one offering should be made during the year—for Missions!

The Cost of a Mistaken Idea

The results that have followed such methods are about what might be expected. In great areas of the country, where the Church should be a potent influence, many do not know it by name. Some of the States where the Church was long ago planted owe practically all they have of Christian teaching to other communions. Dioceses that long ago should have become sources of strength and large contributors to the Church's active working force are still known as missionary districts and dependent on help for their existence. All because the Church has continued to leave its workers to struggle single-handed until their day of opportunity passed. And the record might be made tragic by the story of suffering and heart-breaking disappointment that has been the fate of some of its greatest men because the Church seemed to forget them in their struggle. Nor would it be right for me to leave unsaid that which hurts even while I say it. This same easy-going satisfaction with old methods is to-day breaking the hearts of strong men and the spirit of weak ones by not even providing for an adequate living for them, while it leaves the men who have grown old in the service to find a roof where they may, thus preparing fertile soil for scandal and weakness. Surely the Church cannot expect blessing if these things are, which might be prevented.

The Situation Should be Carefully Studied

Am I not right, then, when I declare that the best thing the Church could do for its work of extension, whether at home or abroad, during the next three years, would be to set itself seriously to correct these things which needlessly hinder its growth and render impossible the full use of its strength? Why should not this

Convention appoint a commission to take into consideration the whole matter of the Church's organization for work, letting it be understood that the very oldest canon relating to that work shall have no favor showed it unless it can be proven useful? I have no doubt that there might be devised a working plan by which all the Church's resources might be made available; by which the various departments of its work might be co-ordinated and made to strengthen one another; by which the work could be so systematized as to put an end to waste; by which the workers, carefully selected and provided for, might be compacted in a strong force, mutually dependent and helpful, heartened by the courage born of *esprit de corps,* inspired by the hope of success.

Such a plan would substitute for an army of individuals asking for help, the Church, the Body of Christ, laying before His servants the opportunity for their devotion. Such a plan would bring to the men now helpless through loneliness or broken by poverty, the strength that comes of serving when God's Church is their support. Such a plan would transform the Church in weak dioceses, converting a pathetic company struggling for existence into a positive influence for righteousness, and a right public opinion; and all this simply because the power or influence of individuals is not measured by what they are or possess, but by what they represent. Such a plan would make the Church forget to talk of the poverty which it knows does not exist, in its enthusiasm for the work which challenges its endeavor. Such a plan would spell victory.

If I had the power to persuade, I would move the Church to take thought for a right organization and a working plan that is worthy of the splendid things that challenge its courage and statesmanship.

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